

**CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM**  
**maintained by the**  
**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**  
**and supported by the**  
**CALIFORNIA INTERAGENCY WILDLIFE TASK GROUP**  
**Database Version 8.1 (2005)**

---

B281 Vaux's Swift *Chaetura vauxi*

Family: Apodidae Order: Apodiformes Class: Aves

Written by: S. Granholm

Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt

Edited by: R. Duke

#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A summer resident of northern California. Breeds fairly commonly in the Coast Ranges from Sonoma Co. north, and very locally south to Santa Cruz Co.; in the Sierra Nevada; and possibly in the Cascade Range. Prefers redwood and Douglas-fir habitats with nest-sites in large hollow trees and snags, especially tall, burned-out stubs. Fairly common migrant throughout most of the state in April and May, and August and September. A few winter irregularly in southern coastal lowlands (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** Feeds exclusively on flying insects taken in long, continuous foraging flights. Feeds high in the air over most terrains and habitats; also feeds commonly at lower levels in forest openings, above burns, and especially above rivers (Grinnell and Miller 1944) and lakes (Terres 1980).

**Cover:** Roosts in hollow trees and snags, and occasionally in chimneys and buildings; often in large flocks (Bent 1940).

**Reproduction:** Nests in redwood, Douglas-fir, and occasionally other coniferous forests. Nest typically built on the vertical inner wall of a large, hollow tree or snag, especially tall stubs charred by fire (Bent 1940). Enters nesting tree from the top or through cracks in the side, and almost always locates nest near the bottom of a cavity, regardless of the height of the entrance. Occasionally nests in chimneys and buildings.

**Water:** No data found.

**Pattern:** The most important habitat requirement appears to be an appropriate nest-site in a large, hollow tree. Forages over most terrains and habitats, often high in the air. Shows an apparent preference for foraging over rivers and lakes.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Activity diurnal, including migration. May enter torpor in periods of cold weather, when flying insects are scarce, as some other swifts do (Terres 1980).

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** Apparently mostly migrates to wintering grounds in Mexico and Central America, but a few winter irregularly in coastal lowlands of southern California. Fairly common in spring and fall migration throughout the state, though unpredictable in occurrence.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: Territoriality has not been reported; territory presumably limited to nest site.

Reproduction: Breeds from early May to mid-August. Solitary nesting apparently typical. Clutch size 3-7 eggs, usually 4-5; incubation lasts 18-20 days. Altricial young tended by both parents; leave the nesting tree at about 28 days (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Sometimes heavily parasitized by lice, which can cause considerable mortality (Bent 1940). May roost early on cold days (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

## REFERENCES

- Baldwin, P. H., and W. F. Hunter. 1963. Nesting and nest visitors of the Vaux's swift in Montana. *Auk* 80:81-85.
- Baldwin, P. H., and N. K. Zaczekowski. 1963. Breeding biology of the Vaux swift. *Condor* 65:400-406.
- Bent, A. C. 1940. Life histories of North American cuckoos, goatsuckers, hummingbirds, and their allies. U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 176. 506pp.
- Ehrlich, P. R., D. S. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. The birder's handbook. Simon and Schuster, New York. 785pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of north American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland OH. 416pp.
- Lack, D. 1956. A review of the genera and nesting habits of swifts. *Auk* 73:1-32.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. A. Knopf, New York. 1100pp.